

Message Text

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BOMBAY 1133

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT IN

SUBJ: CONGRESS DEBACLE IN MAHARASHTRA

REF BOMBAY 0119 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY: ELECTION RETURNS EVE 15TH BROUGHT NEWS FROM
OUTLYING CONSTITUENCIES THAT CONGRESS HAD SUFFERED A CRUSHING
DEFEAT IN RAMTEK PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION AND HAD LOST BOTH
ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTIONS. THE JAN 13 MAHARASHTRA BY-ELECTIONS
THUS CONSTITUTE A DRAMATIC REVERSAL OF THE PRO-CONGRESS SWEEP OF THE
STATE IN 1971 AND 1972.

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2. THE CONGRESS SUFFERED A CRUSHING AND HUMILIATING DEFEAT IN THE RAMTEK (NAGPUR AREA) PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION. CONGRESS HAD WON THIS SEAT BY A MARGIN OF MORE THAN 231,000 VOTES IN 1971 AND TRAILED THE WINNER BY MORE THAN 137,000 VOTES ON JAN 13, 1974. A MONTH AGO IT HAD BEEN EXPECTED THAT THE CONGRESS CANDIDATE KALAMKAR WOULD WIN WITH A COMFORTABLE MARGIN. AS ELECTION NEARED AND AFTER PM WAS DRIVEN OFF PLATFORM IN NAGPUR ON JAN 2 AND CHIEF MIN NAIK AT WARUD JAN 3, CONGRESS PROSPECTS DIMMED PERCEPTIBLY. IN A LAST-DITCH EFFORT TO PLUG THE DIKE, CHIEF MIN NAIK MOVED ON JAN 10 TO SUSPEND STATE MONOPOLY PURCHASE OF COTTON IN EFFORT TRY AND PLACATE IRATE COTTON GROWERS IN RAMTEK AND VIDARBHA REGION. BUT TO NO AVAIL. NOR DID THE CONGRESS CHOICE OF KALAMKAR, THE MVRSS (MAHAVIDARBHA RAJYA SANGHARSHA SAMITI) CANDIDATE AND RUNNER-UP IN THE 1971 POLL, AS ITS CANDIDATE PAY OFF EITHER. THE MVRSS CANDIDATE HEDAU WON AND BY A FAR LARGER MARGIN THAN EVEN HIS SUPPORTERS DREAMED.

3. THE CONGRESS ALSO LOST THE TWO ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTIONS IN THE SANGOLA AND SAVANTIVADI CONSTITUENCIES. CONGRESS PROSPECTS FOR HOLDING THESE TWO SEATS HAD NOT BEEN BRIGHT PARTICULARLY AT SANGOLA AND THESE FEARS WERE CONFIRMED AT THE POLLS. THEY DONT HOLD THEM

1) IT WAS THOUGHT THAT THE CONGRESS WOULD LIKELY LOSE THE SANGOLA SEAT AND IT DID TO THE PWP CANDIDATE (PEASANTS AND WORKERS PARTY) IT WAS A STRAIGHT CONTEST AND THE PWP WON BY ALMOST 13,000 VOTES AS COMPARED TO ITS LOSS TO CONGRESS IN 1972 BY A NARROW MARGIN. THIS AREA WAS BADLY HIT BY LAST YEARS'S DROUGHT AND INsofar AS WE KNOW CONGRESS HAS NOT DONE MUCH IN THIS AREA TO DEAL WITH SHORTAGES.

2) IN THE SPRAWLING BACKWARD SAVANTWADI CONSTITUENCY ON WESTERN COAST THE CONGRESS CANDIDATE CAME IN A POOR THIRD TRAILING THE SOCIALIST PARTY VICTOR BY SOME 11,000 VOTES. AGAIN UNAVAILABILITY OF FOODGRAINS AND OTHER ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES CONTRIBUTED TO CONGRESS ROUT. FORMER RULER SAVANTWADI STOOD AS INDEPENDENT AND CAME IN SECOND.

4. COMMENT: WHAT SEEMED TO BE THE INVINCIBLE RULING CONGRESS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FORTRESS IN MAHARSHTRA IN AFTERMATH 1971/72 ELECTIONS HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY BREACHED BY THE JAN 2 MAHARASHTRA BANDH, HE TREATMENT OF THE PM AT NAGPUR AND CANCELLATION OF HER VISIT TO BOMBAY JAN 14 AND CLIMAXED BY THE CRUSHING AND HUMILIATING DEFEAT SUFFERED IN JAN 13 BY-ELECTIONS. POPULAR DIS-SATISFACTION WITH CONGRESS WAS REFLECTED IN RESULTS OBTAINED AT POLLS AND THIS DISSATISFACTION WAS NOT NEGATED BY TRADITIONAL POLITICAL MANEUVERING AND ELECTORAL DEALS CHARACTERISTIC OF INDIAN

ELECTIONS IN PAST. THE ELECTIONS SUGGEST THAT THE INDIAN VOTER IN URBAN AS WELL AS RURAL AREAS CAN NOT LONGER BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED BY THE INDIAN POLITICIAN AS IN THE PAST. IN THE PROCESS A MORE YOUTHFUL AND DYNAMIC POLITICAL LEADERSHIP MAY EMERGE AND ONE DIFFERING FROM THE CARICATURE OF THE INDIAN POLITICIAN TO WHICH WE HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED. THE MAHARASHTRA RESULTS ALSO SUGGEST THAT VOTERS ARE LOSING CONFIDENCE NOT ONLY IN CONGRESS BUT ALSO IN THE ENTIRE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM AS THEY KNOW IT AND SEE IT FUNCTIONING TODAY. AS ALREADY INDICATED THE ELECTION RESULTS UNDERSCORE THE DEPTH OF POPULAR DISCONTENT OVER SHORTAGES AND RISING PRICES AND DISSATISFACTION WITH THE RULING PARTY'S PERFORMANCE IN COPING WITH SITUATION.

5. THE ELECTORAL RESULTS DO NOT INDICATE HOWEVER ANY CLEAR CUT ALTERNATIVE TO RULING CONGRESS PARTY AND THAT IS PERHAPS LATTER'S GREATEST STRENGTH. FOUR DIFFERENT OPPOSITION PARTIES EMERGED AS VICTORS IN THE JAN 13 ELECTIONS: CPI IN BOMBAY MVRSS IN RAMTEK PWP IN SANGOLA AND SOCIALIST PARTY IN SWVANTWADI FACT THAT NO OPPOSITION PARTY COULD CONTEST ALL FOUR BY-ELECTIONS IS INDICATIVE OF FRAGMENTATION AMONG INDIAN OPPOSITION PARTIES. NEVERTHELESS THE MAHARASHTRA ELECTIONS SUGGEST THAT NEW TRENDS IN INDIAN POLITICAL LIFE ARE BEGINNING TO TAKE SHAPE AND TO THAT EXTENT THE JAN 13 ELECTIONS ARE HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT. MOST IMMEDIATELY THE CONGRESS DEBACLE IS LIKELY TO HAVE REPERCUSSIONS IN THE U.P. AND PARALLEL TRENDS MAY EMERGE THERE. IN MAHARASHTRA THE GOVT MAY DECIDE TO DECONTROL FOODGRAINS TRADE TO OVERCOME AT LEAST PARTIALLY THE CURRENT FOOD CRISIS. ON BALANCE AND WHILE WE SHOULD NOT GENERALIZE PARTICULARLY FROM VANTAGE POINT BOMBAY THE WORM IS BEGINNING TO TURN
BANE UNQTE
MOYNIHAN

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